**Tell the USDA to allow whole milk dairy products in the National School Lunch Program and in the WIC Food Package**

[Current National School Lunch Program guidelines ban whole milk dairy products](http://www.wbez.org/news/culture/nutrition-programs-ditch-whole-milk-110929), such as cheddar cheese, but [allow junk food such Cheetos](http://t.co/eMDQdp4A1l).  Yet several recent studies have found that consumption of skim or low fat dairy products is associated with weight gain and increased BMI in both children and adults. A [recent NPR story](http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2013/03/19/174739752/whole-milk-or-skim-study-links-fattier-milk-to-slimmer-kids)summarized these studies.

Last year Walter Willett, chair of the department of nutrition and epidemiology at the Harvard School of Public Health, and Dr. David Ludwig, director of the New Balance Foundation Obesity Prevention Center at Boston Children's Hospital argued in an editorial in JAMA Pediatrics that "[the evidence now suggests an adverse effect of of reduced-fat milk."](http://healthland.time.com/2013/07/03/skim-milk-is-healthier-than-whole-milk-right-maybe-not/)

As the father of two elementary school-age children, I am saddened that my children’s lunch milk options are limited to plain low-fat milk or chocolate low-fat milk. (Local school districts usually follow the National School Lunch Program nutritional guidelines.) One of the first solid foods we introduced to our children was high-fat goat cheese and whole milk maple yogurt. We continue to feed our children full-fat dairy products such as butter, yogurt, and cheese every day.

Why is whole milk superior? Whole fat dairy contains saturated fats, which are essential for the absorption of the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K.  Whole milk satiates better than skim milk products. That means less snacking and consumption of simple carbohydrate junk foods. The additional fat in whole milk dairy also slows the rise in blood glucose that accompanies the absorption of the sugars in milk. Finally, it's the fat in milk that contains the nutritious compounds such as omega-3 fatty acids and carotenoids that cows ingest [if they are allowed to graze on pasture](http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2013/12/09/249794467/fresh-research-finds-organic-milk-packs-in-omega-3s).

Here's a more detailed summary of some of the recent literature on whole milk dairy consumption and human health:

* A study published earlier this year in [The Journal of Nutrition](http://jn.nutrition.org/content/144/7/1081.abstract) found that children in the highest quartile of full-fat dairy consumption had a reduced risk of excess Total Body Fat Mass compared to children in the lowest quartile of full-fat dairy consumption.
* Last year, [a study published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood](http://adc.bmj.com/content/98/5/335), a sister publication of the British Medical Journal, found that children who drank low-fat milk were usually heavier than children who drank whole milk. This relationship held up for all racial and socioeconomic groups.
* Going back a few more years, in 2005 researchers at [Brigham and Women's Hospital](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Berkey+Milk%2C+dietary+calcium+and+weight+gain) reported that among 9 to 14 year olds, consumption of skim and 1 percent milk was associated with weight gain.
* In 2010, researchers at [Children's Hospital in Boston](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3229928/) found that higher consumption of whole milk at age two was associated with a slightly lower body-mass index. They concluded that switching from whole milk to reduced-fat milk at age 2 years does not appear likely to prevent obesity in early childhood.
* Regarding whole milk consumption and adult health, a recent study, published in the [Scandinavian Journal of Primary Health Care](http://informahealthcare.com/doi/abs/10.3109/02813432.2012.757070), concluded that “a high intake of dairy fat was associated with a lower risk of central obesity and a low dairy fat intake was associated with a higher risk of central obesity.” Participants in the study were men ages 40 – 60, and the associations held up even after adjustments “for intake of fruit and vegetables, smoking, alcohol consumption, physical activity, age, education, and profession.”
* Another recent study, published in the [European Journal of Nutrition](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22810464), is a compilation of previous studies (a meta-analysis.) It found that “the observational evidence does not support the hypothesis that dairy fat or high-fat dairy foods contribute to obesity or cardiometabolic risk, and suggests that high-fat dairy consumption within typical dietary patterns is inversely associated with obesity risk.”

It's time to bring back the fat. We need a school lunch program where our children can enjoy full-fat cheddar cheese instead of Cheetos.

Please join me and urge the USDA to revise its dietary guidelines to reflect the latest science and allow the return of whole milk dairy products to the WIC Food Package and National School Lunch Program.

Thank you for your support.

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